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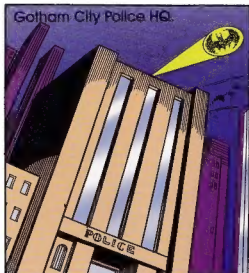


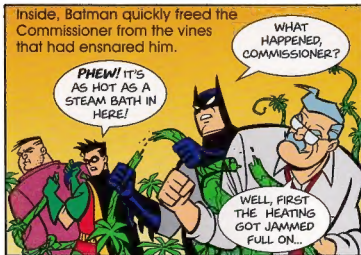
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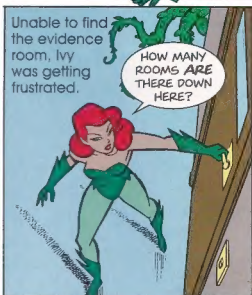
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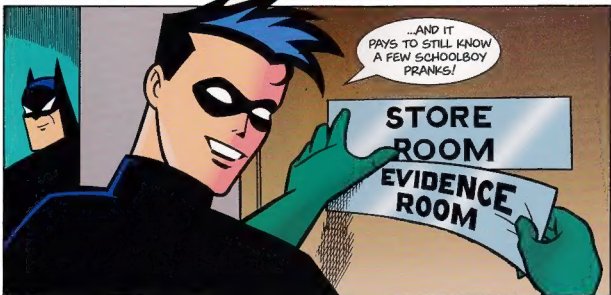
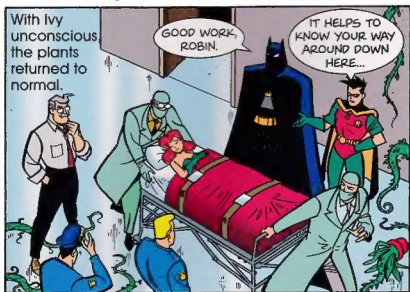
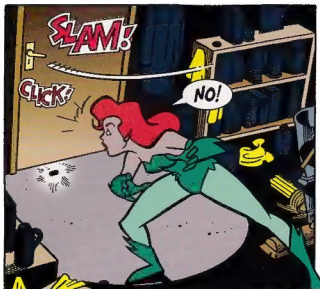














LOVE TO READ
BATMAN
AND
SUPERMAN

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Superman finds himself in a...

FUTURE TENSE



They were still cheering his name in Australia when the Man of Steel returned to the United States. The mighty dam at a huge hydroelectric project in Southern Australia had ruptured, threatening to cover an entire valley with billions of tons of water. Superman, a blue and red blur, had responded in time, contained the immense flow and secured the break in the dam. Thousands owed their lives to him, and the crowds of onlookers and survivors cheered, clapped and applauded as Superman shook hands with the grateful people.

Everyone was cheering and shouting, but through the noise, Superman heard a report coming from a car radio a hundred metres away... "Robots believed to have been constructed by LexCorp are now confirmed to have gone out of control in central Metropolis, causing city-wide destruction..." Superman felt a chill—while he had been saving lives on one

side of the planet, his adopted home on the other side was being destroyed.

The local mayor was just about to start his thank-you speech when he realised Superman had vanished.

The Man of Steel was determined to get back as quickly as possible to stop LexCorp's rampaging robots. Luthor! Although he could never be sure, Superman knew that somehow the LexCorp boss was behind every crisis like this one!

Fighting back his anger, Superman flew faster. He was travelling so fast that the air seemed to warp and twist around him in a bright, white slipstream. For a second, he felt a strange sensation, a curious tremor that passed through his body. But there was no time to worry about it... Metropolis was just ahead... Metropolis...

Superman slowed down hard, and then gently descended towards the city, gazing in horror.

Where the city of Metropolis had stood there was now nothing but a broken, blackened wasteland of twisted stone, concrete and metal.

Reeling and shocked, Superman wandered through the ruins. He couldn't understand...not only was the city destroyed, but it was cold and lifeless, as if this total destruction had happened years and years before.

Suddenly he heard a sound. He dashed through the piles of rubble and found an old, weather-beaten man dressed in filthy rags.

"Don't hurt me! Don't hurt me!" begged the cowering old man, who slowly looked up at the confused hero.

"Superman?" he asked, amazed.

"Do I know you?" asked Superman.

"It's me," said the old man, "Jimmy Olsen!"

The old man, who claimed to be the *Daily Planet* photographer Jimmy Olsen, slowly got up and began to explain. The story he told Superman was dreadful and tragic. He explained that in 1998, in response to Lex Luthor's increasing attempts to take over the city and the world, Superman had waged all-out war against his armies of robots. The war went on and on, with Luthor throwing more and more deadly robot war machines at Superman, and the Man of Steel responded with greater and greater shows of force.

The fighting tore city after city



apart, laying waste to vast sections of the country and creating the wasteland Superman saw now. The people fled in fear, but the war had also damaged the ecosystem and millions perished in the famines and diseases that followed. In fighting Lex Luthor, Superman had helped to destroy the world.

"That was fifty years ago!" sighed Jimmy, "and we survivors have been living in the ruins ever since."

"Fifty years?" gasped Superman. "I've travelled forward in time fifty years...but how...?"

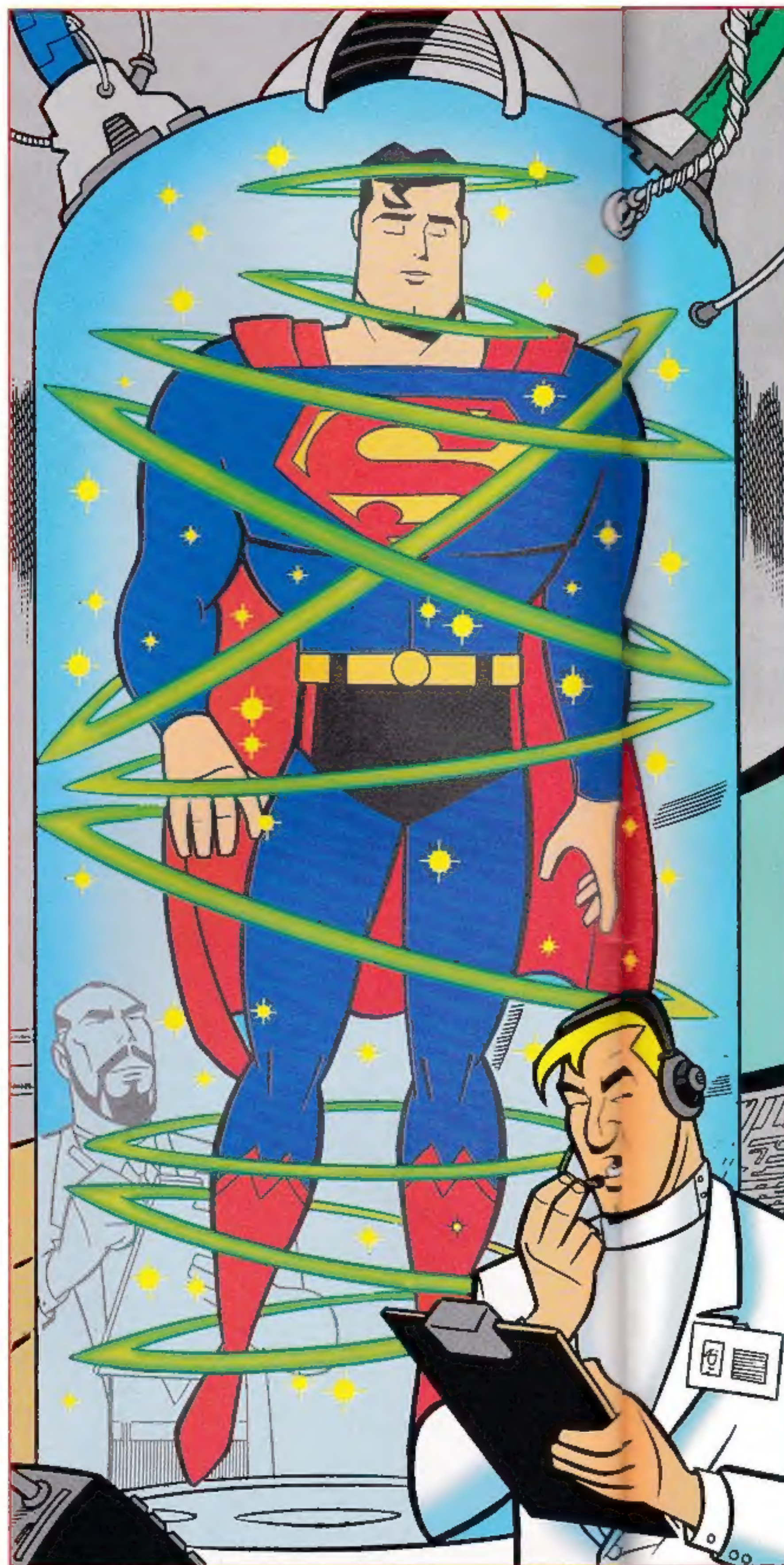
He thought about it, and then remembered the strange white glow that had surrounded him and the odd sensation he had felt when he pushed his speed as fast as it would go. Perhaps he had been going too fast, and created a time-warp that brought him here.

"I could never let this happen!" Superman exclaimed to Jimmy. "I would never snap, never rage against Luthor at the expense of the world."

Jimmy shrugged. "Everyone's got a breaking point," he said. "You obviously reached yours."

"No!" said Superman. "It's not possible!"

Superman's mind was whirling...if this wasn't true, what other explanation could there be? Had he travelled forwards in time or was there some other explanation for the flash of white light? And worst of all, could it be possible, even for a moment, that he could be responsible for this horrible



devastation? Was he capable of doing something so reckless, something with so great a cost?

"We're losing him, sir!" the supervisor told Lex Luthor over the monitor link. Luthor gazed at the video screen on his desk which showed him a LexCorp lab far away from his plush office. In the lab, technicians tended a huge tank in which Superman floated in an energy beam, eyes closed, surrounded by swirling, flickering patterns.

The supervisor looked up from his control station. "He's fighting the mind ray, sir. His will is too strong... shall we power down?"

Luthor sighed. It had been a good try. For a while, he really had believed he could trick his arch-enemy with his mind games and break his spirit. Oh well...

Before Luthor could give the order, Superman woke up and tore up out of the tank, smashing glass, splintering steel and tearing through cables. Several technicians fled but the Man of Steel caught hold of the supervisor.

"What is this?" growled

Superman, sparks crackling from the split cables around him. "Why am I held here in a LexCorp lab? Where's Luthor?"

The supervisor stammered. "We were trying to help you, Superman. We were testing a prototype mind ray, a new LexCorp product that causes the user to experience totally real fantasies. It was meant for the entertainment market. However, you were accidentally caught in the beam and seemed to collapse, suffering some traumatic vision. We've been trying to revive you."

"I find that hard to believe," said Superman. "This was all a plot to weaken me. To destroy my spirit by showing me terrible, nightmarish images."

Superman let the man go and tore the lab equipment into shreds.

"That's the end of your prototype device. I doubt you'll be able to rebuild it and even if you do, I'll just destroy it all over again. Tell your boss it just makes me stronger and more determined to stop him. Make sure he remembers that, next time he tries something."

With that, Superman left, stepping outside the lab and soaring into the air.

Luthor gazed at his video monitor for a long time, looking at the wrecked lab and the dazed technicians.

"Next time indeed..." he muttered to himself.

THE END